



Matt Taibbi

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1. THREAD: The Twitter Files

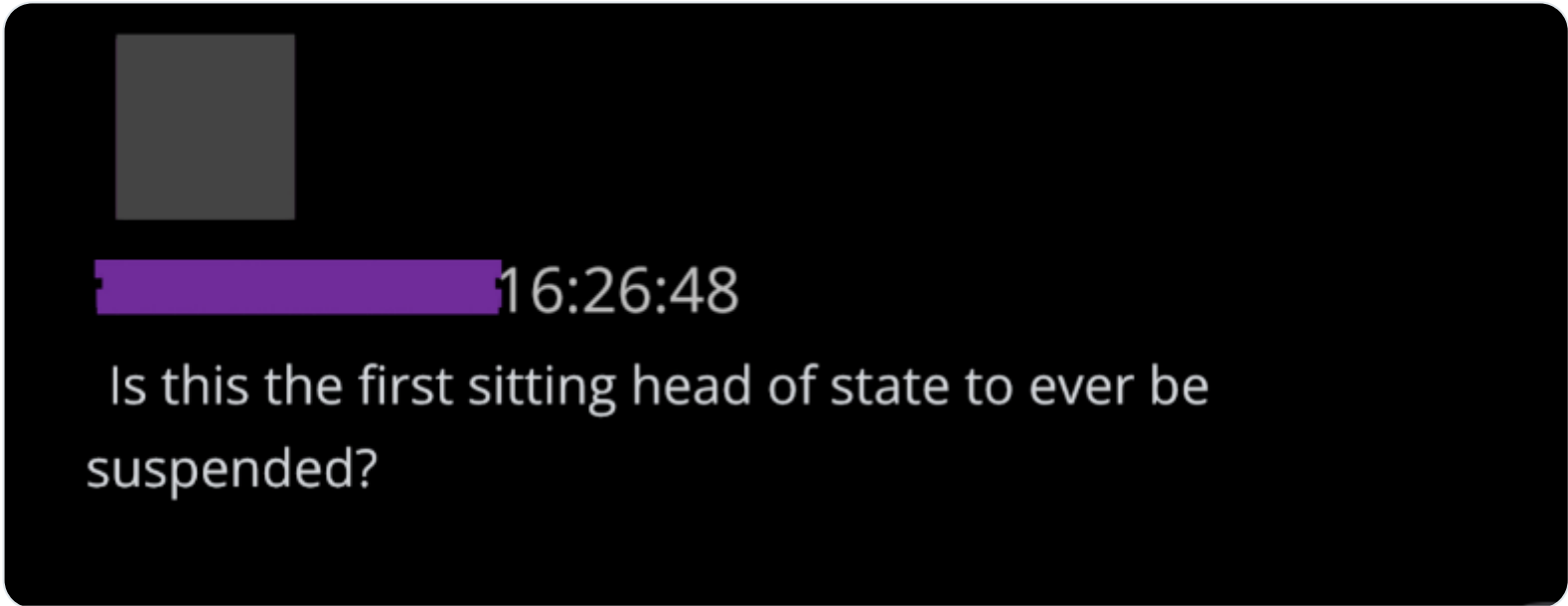
THE REMOVAL OF DONALD TRUMP

Part One: October 2020-January 6th

2. The world knows much of the story of what happened between riots at the Capitol on January 6th, and the removal of President Donald Trump from Twitter on January 8th...
3. We'll show you what hasn't been revealed: the erosion of standards within the company in months before J6, decisions by high-ranking executives to violate their own policies, and more, against the backdrop of ongoing, documented interaction with federal agencies.
4. This first installment covers the period before the election through January 6th. Tomorrow, [@ShellenbergerMD](#) will detail the chaos inside Twitter on January 7th. On Sunday, [@bariweiss](#) will reveal the secret internal communications from the key date of January 8th.

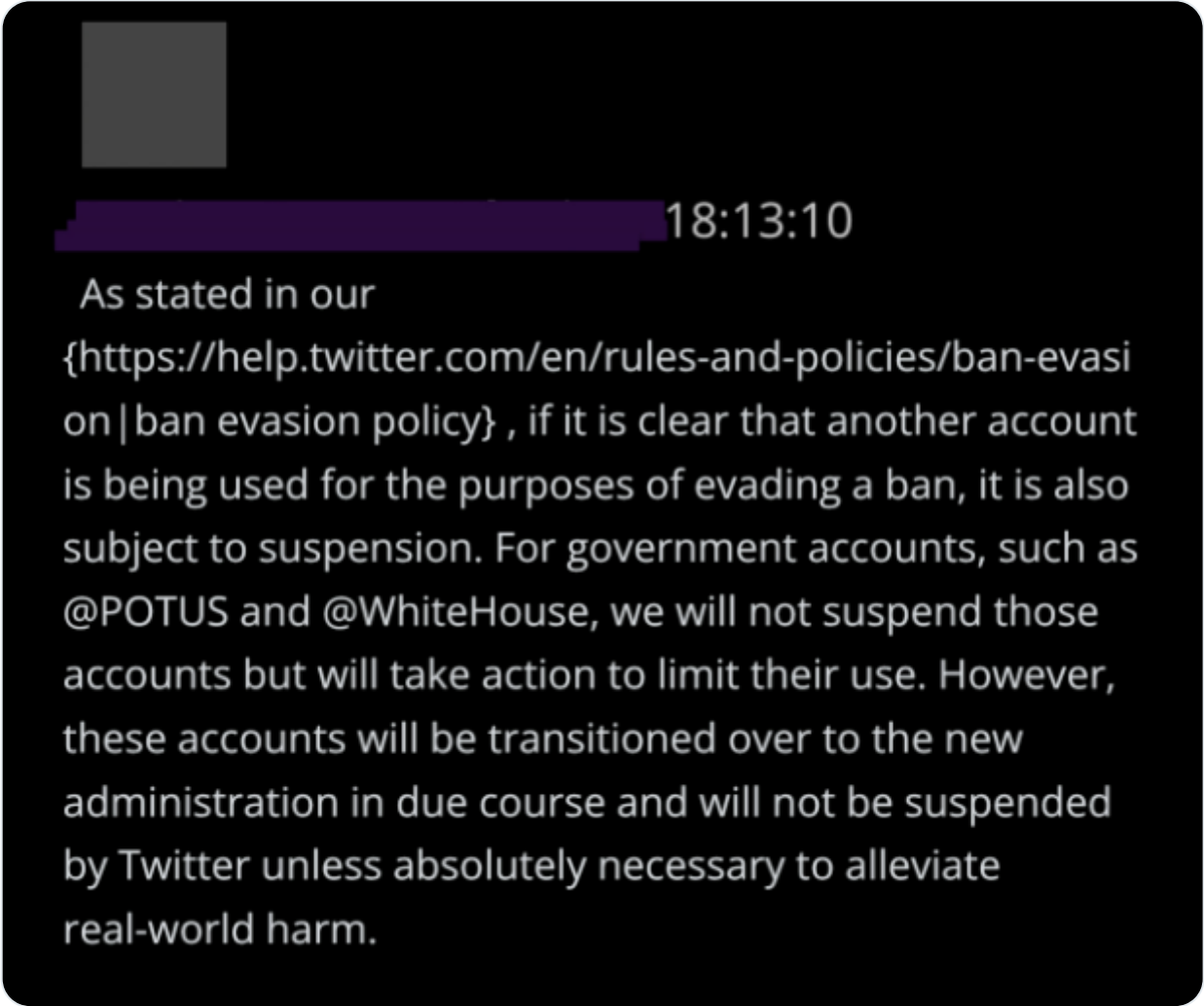
@mentions

5. Whatever your opinion on the decision to remove Trump that day, the internal communications at Twitter between January 6th-January 8th have clear historical import. Even Twitter's employees understood in the moment it was a landmark moment in the annals of speech.



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6. As soon as they finished banning Trump, Twitter execs started processing new power. They prepared to ban future presidents and White Houses – perhaps even Joe Biden. The “new administration,” says one exec, “will not be suspended by Twitter unless absolutely necessary.”



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7. Twitter executives removed Trump in part over what one executive called the “context surrounding”: actions by Trump and supporters “over the course of the election and frankly last 4+ years.” In the end, they looked at a broad picture. But that approach can cut both ways.



11:04:11

Hi Vijaya - i'm working with [REDACTED] on my team to put together a doc to share with you with a POV from research (ours, academics with whom we have been working, etc.) on DJT's language as coded incitement to further violence



11:05:57

In the mean time, here is our quick take: the decision on whether to pull that particular tweet or use that as a last straw for trump depends on many factors including: (1) the overall context and narrative in which that tweet lives - we currently analyze tweets and consider them at a tweet-by-tweet basis which does not appropriately take into account the context surrounding - you can use the yelling fire into a crowded theater example - context matters and the narrative that trump and his friends have pursued over the course of this election and frankly last 4+ years must be taken into account when interpreting and analyzing that tweet (2) the larger question is around our moral imperative and decision as a company, which user sentiment should not drive based on #1, [REDACTED] and I believe that his tweet does violate our rules when taking that historical context + current climate into account

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8. The bulk of the internal debate leading to Trump's ban took place in those three January days. However, the intellectual framework was laid in the months preceding the Capitol riots.

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9. Before J6, Twitter was a unique mix of automated, rules-based enforcement, and more subjective moderation by senior executives. As reported, the firm had a vast array of tools for manipulating visibility, most all of which were thrown at Trump (and others) pre-J6.

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10. As the election approached, senior executives – perhaps under pressure from federal agencies, with whom they met more as time progressed – increasingly struggled with rules, and began to speak of “vios” as pretexts to do what they’d likely have done anyway.

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11. After J6, internal Slacks show Twitter executives getting a kick out of intensified relationships with federal agencies. Here’s Trust and Safety head Yoel Roth, lamenting a lack of “generic enough” calendar descriptions to concealing his “very interesting” meeting partners.

@mentions

12. These initial reports are based on searches for docs linked to prominent executives, whose names are already public. They include Roth, former trust and policy chief Vijaya Gadde, and recently plank-walked Deputy General Counsel (and former top FBI lawyer) Jim Baker.

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13. One particular slack channel offers an unique window into the evolving thinking of top officials in late 2020 and early 2021.

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14. On October 8th, 2020, executives opened a channel called “us2020_xfn_enforcement.” Through J6, this would be home for discussions about election-related removals, especially ones that involved “high-profile” accounts (often called “VITs” or “Very Important Tweeters”).

@mentions

15. There was at least some tension between Safety Operations – a larger department whose staffers used a more rules-based process for addressing issues like porn, scams, and threats – and a smaller, more powerful cadre of senior policy execs like Roth and Gadde.

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16. The latter group were a high-speed Supreme Court of moderation, issuing content rulings on the fly, often in minutes and based on guesses, gut calls, even Google searches, even in cases involving the President.

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17. During this time, executives were also clearly liaising with federal enforcement and intelligence agencies about moderation of election-related content. While we’re still at the start of reviewing the [#TwitterFiles](#), we’re finding out more about these interactions every day.

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18. Policy Director Nick Pickles is asked if they should say Twitter detects “misinfo” through “ML, human review, and **partnerships with outside experts?*” The employee asks, “I know that’s been a slippery process... not sure if you want our public explanation to hang on that.”

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19. Pickles quickly asks if they could “just say “partnerships.” After a pause, he says, “e.g. not sure we’d describe the FBI/DHS as experts.”

20. This post about the Hunter Biden laptop situation shows that Roth not only met weekly with the FBI and DHS, but with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI):

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21. Roth’s report to FBI/DHS/DNI is almost farcical in its self-flagellating tone:

“We blocked the NYP story, then unblocked it (but said the opposite)... comms is angry, reporters think we’re idiots... in short, FML” (fuck my life).

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23. Some of Roth’s later Slacks indicate his weekly confabs with federal law enforcement involved separate meetings. Here, he ghosts the FBI and DHS, respectively, to go first to an “Aspen Institute thing,” then take a call with Apple.

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24. Here, the FBI sends reports about a pair of tweets, the second of which involves a former Tippecanoe County, Indiana Councilor and Republican named claiming “Between 2% and 25% of Ballots by Mail are Being Rejected for Errors.”

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The FBI's second report concerned this tweet by :

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25. The FBI-flagged tweet then got circulated in the enforcement Slack. Twitter cited Politifact to say the first story was “proven to be false,” then noted the second was already deemed “no vio on numerous occasions.”

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26. The group then decides to apply a “Learn how voting is safe and secure” label because one commenter says, “it’s totally normal to have a 2% error rate.” Roth then gives the final go-ahead to the process initiated by the FBI:

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27. Examining the entire election enforcement Slack, we didn’t see one reference to moderation requests from the Trump campaign, the Trump White House, or Republicans generally. We looked. They may exist: we were told they do. However, they were absent here.

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31. In one case, former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee joke-tweets about mailing in ballots for his “deceased parents and grandparents.”

32. This inspires a long Slack that reads like an parody. “I agree it’s a joke,” concedes a Twitter employee, “but he’s also literally admitting in a tweet a crime.”

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The group declares Huck’s an “edge case,” and though one notes, “we don’t make exceptions for jokes or satire,” they ultimately decide to leave him be, because “we’ve poked enough bears.”

33. "Could still mislead people... could still mislead people," the humor-averse group declares, before moving on from Huckabee

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33. Roth suggests moderation even in this absurd case could depend on whether or not the joke results in “confusion.” This seemingly silly case actually foreshadows serious later issues:

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34. In the docs, execs often expand criteria to subjective issues like intent (yes, a video is authentic, but why was it shown?), orientation (was a banned tweet shown to condemn, or support?), or reception (did a joke cause “confusion”?). This reflex will become key in J6.

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35. In another example, Twitter employees prepare to slap a “mail-in voting is safe” warning label on a Trump tweet about a postal screwup in Ohio, before realizing “the events took place,” which meant the tweet was “factually accurate”:

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36. “VERY WELL DONE ON SPEED” Trump was being “visibility filtered” as late as a week before the election. Here, senior execs didn’t appear to have a particular violation, but still worked fast to make sure a fairly anodyne Trump tweet couldn’t be “replied to, shared, or liked”:

@mentions

"VERY WELL DONE ON SPEED": the group is pleased the Trump tweet is dealt with quickly

@mentions

37. A seemingly innocuous follow-up involved a tweet from actor , whose ubiquitous presence in argued-over Twitter data sets is already a [#TwitterFiles](#) in-joke.

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38. After Woods angrily quote-tweeted about Trump’s warning label, Twitter staff – in a preview of what ended up happening after J6 – despaired of a reason for action, but resolved to “hit him hard on future vio.”

@mentions

39. Here a label is applied to Georgia Republican congresswoman Jody Hice for saying, “Say NO to big tech censorship!” and, “Mailed ballots are more prone to fraud than in-person balloting... It’s just common sense.”

@mentions

40. Twitter teams went easy on Hice, only applying “soft intervention,” with Roth worrying about a “wah wah censorship” optics backlash:

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41. Meanwhile, there are multiple instances of involving pro-Biden tweets warning Trump “may try to steal the election” that got surfaced, only to be approved by senior executives. This one, they decide, just “expresses concern that mailed ballots might not make it on time.”

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42. “THAT’S UNDERSTANDABLE”: Even the hashtag [#StealOurVotes](#) – referencing a theory that a combo of Amy Coney Barrett and Trump will steal the election – is approved by Twitter brass, because it’s “understandable” and a “reference to... a US Supreme Court decision.”

@mentions

43. In this exchange, again unintentionally humorous, former Attorney General Eric Holder claimed the U.S. Postal Service was “deliberately crippled,” ostensibly by the Trump administration. He was initially hit with a generic warning label, but it was quickly taken off by Roth:

@mentions

44. Later in November 2020, Roth asked if staff had a “debunk moment” on the “SCYTL/Smartmantic vote-counting” stories, which his DHS contacts told him were a combination of “about 47” conspiracy theories:

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45. On December 10th, as Trump was in the middle of firing off 25 tweets saying things like, “A coup is taking place in front of our eyes,” Twitter executives announced a new “L3 deamplification” tool. This step meant a warning label now could also come with deamplification:

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46. Some executives wanted to use the new deamplification tool to silently limit Trump’s reach more right away, beginning with the following tweet:

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47. However, in the end, the team had to use older, less aggressive labeling tools at least for that day, until the “L3 entities” went live the following morning.

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48. The significance is that it shows that Twitter, in 2020 at least, was deploying a vast range of visible and invisible tools to rein in Trump’s engagement, long before J6. The ban will come after other avenues are exhausted

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49. In Twitter docs execs frequently refer to “bots,” e.g. “let’s put a bot on that.” A bot is just any automated heuristic moderation rule. It can be anything: every time a person in Brazil uses “green” and “blob” in the same sentence, action might be taken.

@mentions

50. In this instance, it appears moderators added a bot for a Trump claim made on Breitbart. The bot ends up

bot”). Trump by J6 was quickly covered in bots.

@mentions

51. There is no way to follow the frenzied exchanges among Twitter personnel from between January 6th and 8th without knowing the basics of the company’s vast lexicon of acronyms and Orwellian unwords.

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52. To “bounce” an account is to put it in timeout, usually for a 12-hour review/cool-off:

@mentions

53. “Interstitial,” one of many nouns used as a verb in Twitterspeak (“denylist” is another), means placing a physical label atop a tweet, so it can’t be seen.

@mentions

54. PII has multiple meanings, one being “Public Interest Interstitial,” i.e. a covering label applied for “public interest” reasons. The post below also references “proactive V,” i.e. proactive visibility filtering.

@mentions

55. This is all necessary background to J6. Before the riots, the company was engaged in an inherently insane/impossible project, trying to create an ever-expanding, ostensibly rational set of rules to regulate every conceivable speech situation that might arise between humans.

@mentions

This project was preposterous yet its leaders were unable to see this, having become infected with groupthink, coming to believe – sincerely – that it was Twitter’s responsibility to control, as much as possible, what people could talk about, how often, and with whom.

@mentions

56. When panic first breaks out on J6 there’s a fair share of WTF-type posts, mixed in with frantic calls for Twitter to start deploying its full arsenal of moderation tools. “What is the right remediation? Do we interstitial the video?” asks one employee, in despair:

@mentions

57. This “Freedom or Death” tweet from [#StopTheSteal](#) gadfly Mike Coudrey elicits heated reactions:

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58. Roth groans about Coudrey: “THIS asshole,” but still seems determined to stick at least superficially to rules, itching to act “if” this “constitutes incitement.”

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59. At 2:39 p.m. PST, a comms official asked Roth to confirm or deny a story that they’d restricted Trump’s ability to tweet. Roth says, “We have not.”

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60. Minutes later, Roth executed the historic act of “bouncing” Trump, i.e. putting him in timeout. “I hope you

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This theme of Policy perhaps being stressed by queries from Communications executives – who themselves have to answer the public’s questions – occasionally appears. Two days later, you see chatter about pulling Comms out of the loop:

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61. The first company-wide email from Gadde on January 6th announced that 3 Trump tweets had been bounced, but more importantly signaled a determination to use legit “violations” as a guide for any possible permanent suspension:

@mentions

62. “WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK?” Safe to say Trump’s “Go home with love & in peace” tweet mid-riot didn’t go over well at Twitter HQ:

@mentions

63. A few last notes about January 6th. Roth at one point looked and found Trump had a slew of duplicate bot applications:

@mentions

64. By the end of the first day, the top execs are still trying to apply rules. By the next day, they will contemplate a major change in approach. Watch this weekend for the play-by-play of how all that went down.

@mentions

65. By January 8th, which will describe Sunday, Twitter will be receiving plaudits from “our partners” in Washington, and the sitting U.S. president will no longer be heard on the platform.

@mentions

66. Lastly, people on the left, right, and in between want to know what else is in the [#TwitterFiles](#), from suppression/shadow-banning of leftists to lab-leak theorists, or amplification of military propaganda or conservative accounts. We know everyone has questions.

@mentions

67. And while we’ve stumbled on tidbits here and there about topics ranging from COVID to foreign policy, the reality is the data sets are enormous and we’re still working through them.

More is coming. Good night, all.

. . .


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Bari Weiss
[@bariweiss](#)

Dec 9

THREAD: THE TWITTER FILES PART TWO. TWITTER’S SECRET BLACKLISTS.

1. A new #TwitterFiles investigation reveals that teams of Twitter employees build blacklists, prevent disfavored tweets from trending, and actively limit the visibility of entire accounts or even trending topics—all in secret, without informing users.
2. Twitter once had a mission “to give everyone the power to

Read 31 tweets



Michael Shellenberger
[@ShellenbergerMD](#)

Dec 10

1. TWITTER FILES, PART 4 The Removal of Donald Trump: January 7 As the pressure builds, Twitter executives build the case for a permanent ban

On Jan 7, senior Twitter execs: - create justifications to ban Trump - seek a change of policy for Trump alone, distinct from other political leaders - express no concern for the free speech or democracy implications of a ban This #TwitterFiles is reported with @lwoodhouse

Read 40 tweets



Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò (QTE)
[@ArchbpVigano](#)

Dec 11

1. For two years now we have been witnessing a global coup d’état, in which a financial and ideological elite has succeeded in seizing control of part of national governments, public and private institutions, the media, the judiciary, politicians and religious leaders.
2. All of these, without distinction, have become enslaved to these new masters who ensure power, money and social affirmation to their accomplices.

Read 28 tweets



Avid Halaby
[@AvidHalaby](#)

Dec 12

The stuff uncovered in the Twitter whistleblower report is much crazier than anything in the "Twitter files" but it's much less politically/tribally salient so it got no attention. Going to do a thread on some of the craziest things, in no particular order.

Twitter didn't monitor employee computers at all, it was not uncommon for employees to install spyware on work devices

Read 17 tweets

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Matt Taibbi
[@mtaibbi](#)


Dec 6

THREAD: Twitter Files Supplemental

On Friday, the first installment of the Twitter files was published here. We expected to publish more over the weekend. Many wondered why there was a delay.

We can now tell you part of the reason why. On Tuesday, Twitter Deputy General Counsel (and former FBI General Counsel) Jim Baker was fired. Among the reasons? Vetting the first batch of “Twitter Files” – without knowledge of new

Read 10 tweets



Matt Taibbi
[@mtaibbi](#)

Dec 2

1. Thread: THE TWITTER FILES

2. What you’re about to read is the first installment in a series, based upon thousands of internal documents obtained by sources at Twitter.

3. The “Twitter Files” tell an incredible story from inside one of the world’s largest and most influential social media platforms. It is a Frankensteinian tale of a human-built mechanism grown out the control of its designer.

Read 40 tweets



Matt Taibbi
[@mtaibbi](#)

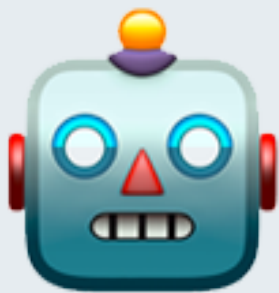
Jun 7

Thread. 1) Thirty or forty years ago, supporting free speech was understood to be a non-negotiable core value of the liberal left. [taibbi.substack.com/p/democrats-an...](#)

2) Pop culture endlessly celebrated liberalism’s uncompromising support of speech rights — from The People Vs. Larry Flynt to Field of Dreams to The American President. [taibbi.substack.com/p/democrats-an...](#)

3) Think of “President Shepard’s” speech in “The American

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